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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 BANJUL 000422

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PHUM](#) [KMCA](#) [PGOV](#) [AU](#) [GA](#)
SUBJECT: THE GAMBIA: AF DAS THOMAS-GREENFIELD'S MEETING
WITH PRESIDENT JAMMEH

REF: A. BANJUL 386

[1](#)B. BANJUL 280

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Classified By: AMBASSADOR JOSEPH STAFFORD, REASON 1.4 (B AND D)

SUMMARY

[1](#)1. (C) President Jammeh extended a warm welcome to visiting AF DAS Thomas-Greenfield, who urged the GOTG to take steps to reverse the negative trends in GOTG's performance that had resulted in the suspension of The Gambia's MCA eligibility. Jammeh gave assurances that opposition parties would be allowed to compete fully and freely in the September Presidential election, but went on to criticize the country's largest opposition party, UDP, portraying it as seeking to restore the political dominance of the Mandinka ethnic group. Thomas-Greenfield raised our deep concern over reports of torture and other abuses of detainees suspected of involvement in the March abortive coup plot; Jammeh insisted that anyone linked to the plot would be prosecuted in order to deter future would-be plotters. Thomas-Greenfield also underscored our concern over the GOTG's crackdown on the press; Jammeh asserted that no journal would be allowed to publish material that could incite disorder or otherwise threaten the country's peace and stability. Regarding suspension of MCA eligibility, Jammeh said he was "offended" that the GOTG was not informed prior to the MCC's going public with the decision, claiming that he learned of it "from the BBC." Thomas-Greenfield and Ambassador stressed our desire to consult closely with the GOTG on steps it could take to lay the groundwork for reinstatement of eligibility. Thomas-Greenfield's visit served as an excellent opportunity to impress upon Jammeh the depth of Washington's concern over the deterioration in the GOTG's performance that prompted the MCC's action. Jammeh met afterward with UK Minister for Triesman and reportedly took an anti-U.S. swipe. END SUMMARY.

NEED FOR FRANK TALK BETWEEN FRIENDS

[1](#)2. (C) Visiting AF DAS Linda Thomas-Greenfield, accompanied by Ambassador and AF Staff Assistant Plumb, met with President Yahya Jammeh July 2 on the margins of the AU Summit here. Jammeh extended a warm welcome, recalling Thomas-Greenfield's previous assignment to The Gambia in the 1980's. Thomas-Greenfield responded that, in both her official and personal capacity, she was visiting as a friend of The Gambia. She pointed out that frank and sincere talk between friends was important, all the more so given the current difficult period in our bilateral relationship, as

underscored by the Millenium Challenge Corporation's (MCC) June 16 decision to suspend The Gambia's eligibility for the Millenium Challenge Account (MCA) program. She urged the GOTG to take steps to reverse the negative trends in human rights and other areas that had prompted the suspension and ensure that the Presidential election in September was free and fair.

JAMMEH ON ELECTIONS

¶3. (C) In response, Jammeh gave assurances that the opposition parties would be allowed to compete fully and freely in the election, saying, "I have no problem with the opposition." However, he went on to criticize at length an unnamed opposition party (i.e. the country's largest opposition party, the United Democratic Party -- UDP), portraying it as an agent of the Mandinka ethnic group (the country's most populous ethnic group) and accusing it of seeking to restore Mandinka dominance of the government that had existed prior to his accession to power. (NOTE: Jammeh is from a small, lower-caste ethnic group, the Jolla. END NOTE) Stating that The Gambia "does not belong to the Mandinkas," Jammeh alleged that the UDP leadership's was "hostile" toward him and his ruling APRC party. (COMMENT: While the UDP -- and other opposition parties -- may well include in its ranks Mandinka elements associated with the Jawara regime overthrown by Jammeh, his assertion that the party's mission is to advance a Mandika ethnic agenda strikes us as off the mark. END COMMENT.)

FAILED COUP PLOT

¶4. (C) Jammeh addressed the failed coup plot in March, saying that he had refrained from declaring a state of emergency or otherwise restricting citizens' rights. He gave assurances that those accused of involvement in the failed

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plot would receive fair trials, maintaining that those involved needed to be prosecuted in order to deter future would-be plotters. He asserted, in this regard, that in the past the GOTG had simply dismissed coup plotters from the military rather than prosecute them. (COMMENT: This is the first we have heard of such lenient treatment of coup plotters and note that in past failed overthrow attempts that we are aware of, those involved were indeed prosecuted and in some cases executed. END COMMENT.)

¶5. (C) Thomas-Greenfield replied that while we condemned any attempt to change a government by coup or other extra-constitutional means, we had received credible reports of torture and other abuses of detainees' rights. She added that, to our knowledge, there were detainees -- e.g., Mariam Denton, opposition figure and lawyer of accused plotter Tamsir Jasseh, and APRC National Assembly deputy Duta Kamaso -- that had yet to be charged, despite the legal requirement that persons in custody be charged within 72 hours after being detained. Thomas-Greenfield urged that in the absence of concrete evidence of wrongdoing by Denton, Kamaso, and others yet to be charged, they be promptly released. In reply, Jammeh insisted that Kamaso had indeed been charged and stated that, in Denton's case, she had yet to be charged because of an ongoing "plea bargaining" process stemming from the allegation that she had prior knowledge of the coup plot but failed to notify authorities. Ambassador noted that there appeared to be instances in which authorities had actually released detainees who had prior knowledge of the March plot, but had not actually participated in it. Jammeh reacted dismissively, saying "no one is above the law" and reiterating that all those connected with the plot would be prosecuted.

¶6. (C) Addressing allegations of detainees' torture, Jammeh asserted his respect for human rights, while remarking that

he could not be held responsible for whatever abuses individual security officials may have committed. In reply, Thomas-Greenfield reminded him that, in any government, it is the head who must ultimately assume responsibility for the actions of subordinate officials. When Jammeh accused the USG of applying double standards in claiming abuses by other governments while ignoring those it commits (e.g., mistreatment of Abu Ghreib prisoners), Thomas-Greenfield responded that, to the contrary, the USG was determined to see that its personnel responsible for abuses, whether at Abu Ghreib prison or elsewhere, were brought to account.

CRACKDOWN ON PRESS

17. (C) Thomas-Greenfield registered our deep concern over the GOTG's crackdown on the press, as reflected in authorities' closure of the privately-owned journal, the "Independent" following the aborted coup plot. Jammeh, citing an incident in Nigeria several years ago in which a newspaper's publication of material deemed blasphemous by Muslims sparked Muslim-Christian violence, said he would not permit any journal to publish material that could incite disorder or otherwise threaten The Gambia's peace and stability. He accused the "Independent" of such incitement and indicated that it would not be allowed to resume publication. (COMMENT: While the "Independent" was known for its diehard anti-Jammeh outlook, to portray it as inciting unrest is an exaggeration. END COMMENT.)

SUSPENSION OF MCA ELIGIBILITY

18. (C) Jammeh was dismissive about the MCC's decision to suspend The Gambia's MCA eligibility, saying, "it (the suspension) is not a problem for me, since I never expected The Gambia to benefit from it anyway." At the same time, he repeatedly said he was "offended" at what he claimed was our failure to inform the GOTG of the decision prior to publicizing it, asserting "I first heard about the suspension from the BBC." (NOTE: As reported in ref a, Ambassador met June 17 with the Foreign Minister to deliver MCC CEO Danilovich's June 16 letter to Jammeh conveying the MCC's decision; Ambassador also gave the Foreign Minister a copy of MCC's June 16 press release announcing the decision. END NOTE) Thomas-Greenfield and Ambassador stressed our desire to consult closely with the GOTG on concrete steps it could take to lay the groundwork for reinstatement of eligibility; Jammeh took this on board without comment.

19. (C) As the conversation drew to a close, Jammeh portrayed the suspension of MCA eligibility as a manifestation of the USG's failure to reciprocate his acts of good will, citing, in particular, the GOTG's cooperation on counter-terrorism

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activities and its contribution of forces to the AU mission in Darfur (AMIS). In familiar terms, he maintained that he had acted in response to an approach from Washington in contributing forces to AMIS, but that the USG had not followed through on its "commitment" to provide equipment directly to the Gambian contingent. (NOTE: Jammeh was referring to a September 2004 meeting with USG officials on UNGA margins in New York; as we have repeatedly reminded Jammeh, the USG made no "commitment" to provide direct assistance to Gambian forces. END NOTE)

AFRICAN UNION SUMMIT

110. (C) Before departing, Thomas-Greenfield congratulated the President on a successful African Union Summit. Jammeh, who looked proud of his accomplishments as he presided over the Summit's opening ceremonies, was pleased by the compliment. Thomas-Greenfield was quick to add, however, her concern over the inflammatory speeches given by Venezuelan President Hugo

Chavez and Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad. She expressed particular displeasure over Chavez's anti-American rhetoric. (NOTE: It remains unclear whether Jammeh or the African Union invited Chavez and Ahmadinejad to participate in the Summit, but the former appears more likely. In fact, several African delegations shared their dismay with Thomas-Greenfield over the decision. END NOTE)

COMMENT

¶11. (C) As in the Ambassador's May 4 meeting with Jammeh (ref b), he was defensive and resentful in discussing with Thomas-Greenfield the GOTG's deteriorating record on human rights. He also evoked the familiar theme of U.S. ingratitude in response to the GOTG's acts of "good will" and cooperation in such areas as the global war on terrorism. At the same time, Thomas-Greenfield's visit served as an excellent opportunity to impress upon Jammeh the depth of Washington's concern over the negative trends in the GOTG's performance that resulted in the suspension of MCA eligibility. The fact that he agreed to the meeting amidst the hectic activities surrounding the AU Summit suggested his desire to keep the channels of communication open during this rough patch in our bilateral ties.

¶12. (C) Immediately following the meeting with Thomas-Greenfield, Jammeh met with the head of the UK's Summit delegation, Minister for Africa Lord David Triesman. After his meeting, Triesman and accompanying UK High Commissioner Jenkinson told us that Jammeh had used the discussion to "rant" about Western criticism of the GOTG's slippage on human rights and also took swipes at the USG -- e.g., noting that a dual U.S.-Gambian citizen (Tamsir Jasseh) was a leading suspect in the failed coup plot and insinuating possible USG sympathy for the plot. END COMMENT.

¶13. (U) This message cleared by DAS Thomas-Greenfield.

STAFFORD